

Up here on Casings

a short novel

by

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Jersey Kid Wins

Dwayne walked past the young trees to the big open area with the trucks and cars to a long wall and the corner that led to the big set of doors. He'd been alone for thirty minutes and walked to the building to find me and my housemates. From a Wal-mart check-out line I saw him and raised a finger high to say we were almost done. He stopped and waited. We fingered our shopping bags and left the building, then went back toward the wagon-truck around the corner to the spot that has a good view of the lowlands west and north. We drove back to the San Juans and it was good. We were done there for a month.

I wanted to kill Dwayne for a few reasons, for my benefit and for his. But none of my reasons proved good enough. He used to be someone I might not even mention. And there's honesty to that, having all your cards up on the table, or up on the mesa. Life is about others, I've been told, so I cannot ignore his story with my own which is not nearly as incredible. In a special way I knew him pretty well over the years, and with all that's happened, it would be stupid if I didn't tell the whole Dwayne story as best I can. And no doubt it's better now being about more than just a young CPA living off in the San Juan Mountains for a time.

It wasn't me that shot both guns, but you could say with deadly accuracy that I was partly responsible for him being hit. I brought him to the bullets. The bullets I did deliver, wrapped in a bow. If stupidity was a crime this could be a showcase.

I imagined several times what the local headlines might say: "New Jersey Kids Win!" or maybe just: "Jersey Kids Do Better Than Expected!" Whether we truly won at the trial could be debated. I also imagined the Colorado Deputy Attorney General walking to his clean white pickup with a grin on his face. "The drive down to Telluride will be nice," he might have thought. But he didn't know he'd be facing The Great Dwayne Serend.

When Dwayne was twenty-two, he gave me his extra driver's license—after he lost his then found it again, after getting a replacement. I was nineteen. We looked alike somewhat so it worked. "You two look so much alike!" people often said, which I never liked to hear, but it did get me into bars when I was pre-twenty-one. My pals got stopped for their fake IDs. But mine was real. You could say I had a little Dwayne in my pocket.

I should've understood the goodness of Dwayne in the San Juan Mountains sooner than I did. He was largely crowding my space. I was doing my best to pull a *Cool Hand Luke* or a hip *Guardian of the Galaxy*. I thought that success in finding anything, including l-o-v-e, is quite rational! The harder you try smartly the more likely you are to get it—and you're better off if you understand everything! Crazy people don't win very often.

As for me, I was on the somewhat lackadaisical mission to do something not boring, and getting far from family was also a welcome idea, Kearny and the whole Tri-State Area included. You might say my chief interest was to avoid complicated things.

Dwayne didn't pack a big wardrobe for his move, but if you ask me, he did bring his unique baggage—and his clean brown socks of course. Smelly feet he never had—he was so conscientious he never wore the same socks two days in a row.

In the shell of a nut, despite his long history of loner-hood, Dwayne is the king of infinite smarts, one of the most selfless people who ever lived—not to mention a lucky one. He stood out being regular though—not short or tall, one sixty or seventy with medium everything—shoe size, brown hair, etc. He was never wild and smiling like he was a suspicious devil’s advocate. He brought his obtuseness to the San Juans but he was always the serious logician. He also came close to doing the most altruistic thing the world has ever known, but that’s a side story. Some say his move to the southwest was a “great coincidence”—and to say he shot a kid out there is misleading, doesn’t explain it well, but I’ll get back to that. On top of all the major drama, I was indeed very surprised by the two things I found on his kitchen table down in the little Vegas.

There are three undeniable miracles in the Dwayne story: the Ouray day, Ms. Kim Carson, and the Just One Year—and there was also of course the trial. Overall, his and my story, because of his, might be an inspirational one. He’s always had a different angle on life, the productive, efficient, and rational, but always the caring, too, I have to admit. Over the decades he’s been tough to be around. But his knowledge and personality—despite any criticisms from me—turned out to be bi-products of a life force.

When I was fourteen, nine years ago now, I remember my mom in the next room talking about careers to my much older brother James, then a new college graduate. I’m sure what she said didn’t help him much, but somehow he turned out well. He helps run a gigantic magazine now.

“Writers are decent people, carpenters are great handymen, but bankers are the best providers,” she said, referring to the things her elder boy, and also her nephew Dwayne were doing at the time.